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when we asked for protection from the dangers of the road, as they recognised instinctively that: 'Happy is the people whose God is Jehovah.'

It was great joy at one small oasis[1] to be greeted by an old friend, a man who had registered his name in Ansi as an enquirer. He had been appointed as inspector of the poles which carry the single telegraph wire across this part of the desert, the gales so constantly uprooting them that the whole route is divided into sections, each of which is placed in the charge of a responsible man whose business it is to keep them in repair. At a further stage of the journey where the work was not so well arranged, we often found the poles lying flat, our mules' feet being in danger from the entangled coils upon the ground. The line of the trade-route is indicated by this single telegraph wire, which often seems to the despairing traveller the only assurance he has of human things not seen—men, families, cities, and the normal objects of life.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE RAVINE OF BABOONS

At Iris Well we were only thirty long miles from Hsinghsinghsia, the military frontier station of Turkestan. We were anxious to arrive by daylight as we had reason to anticipate delay, and we hoped that twenty-four hours would be sufficient for transacting all business relating to passports and permits; it was a great relief, therefore, to see the clouds gathering, which meant the promise of a cool day. Taking advantage of this we hurried up all our preparations, and left in good time. At midday we reached the frontier proper—a waterless

[1] [Near Malienking -- Analyst]

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site but marked by a shrine flanked with two high poles. A stake roughly carved to suggest the form of a man was driven into the ground, and its rounded knob was thick with the oil which generations of carters have poured over it as a libation.

We hastened on, and before nightfall came in sight of the Pass, which bears the strange name of 'The Ravine of Baboons.' It was not encouraging to catch sight of a group of soldiers watching us through field-glasses from an eminence. At the entrance to the Ravine we found a military tent pitched, and the guards waiting to question us. The N.C.O. was none too well-mannered. He scoffed at the idea of our carrying so heavy a load of books, and said: 'If you tell me stories like that I'll search your baggage through!' We then produced our passports, which he scrutinised. They were important-looking documents, and evidently impressed him, perhaps the more so because he was wholly illiterate, as we discovered next day. The mere sight of them, however, had a wholesome effect upon him, for he handed them back with an apology for not being able to offer us tea in his tent. We continued our way through the narrow Pass for another two miles, and at every turn of the road soldiers appeared. When we reached the little village we were at once surrounded by a crowd of military, and an officer coming on the scene told us we could not proceed until such a time as the Governor, by telegram, should have indicated his willingness for us to do so. He directed us then to the only vacant room in the place, which was situated in an inn court so small that the carts had to stand in the road outside. The room itself was wretched beyond description. It had no door, while a hole in the wall served as window, so that we were unable for a moment to escape the inspection of the crowd of soldiers. The

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kang was broken down, the top surface of mud had given way, and through the large holes the semi-burnt horse-manure appeared in the space below. We received a good deal of gratuitous, but not ill-natured, advice from the young recruits as to the angle at which our bedding could best be distributed, to lessen the danger of falling into the chasm. 'That quilt must come a little more to the north, or your feet will be down the hole.' 'It is a tight fit for three, but you can move a little more to the east and still be safe.'

Failing hot water, we sent for a basin full of cold, provoking the remark: 'They are extraordinarily clean. Always washing!' We were indeed glad at last to lie down under cover of darkness and get some hours of sleep! Viewed by the light of the grey dawn our conditions looked no less wretched than they had done the night before. The court was again crowded, and round the entrance of the inn groups of men and boys were already gathered throwing dice and gambling for small stakes. Half-a-dozen youths at once attracted our attention, their trouser-legs having been slit down, showing the flesh covered with festering wounds as a result of floggings. At 8 a.m. an officer came round, and we signified to him our desire to move on that day. He was aggravatingly affable, and told us that on such a hard journey as the one we were taking, it was always well to rest for a day. 'Our own food-supply and the grain for the animals is only sufficient to get us through to Hami,' we protested, 'and delay will be serious.' 'Yes, yes, yes, yes,' he replied, 'you leave it to me and I'll see that the telegram to the Governor goes to-day,' thus incidentally revealing the fact that he had not yet sent it.

It was useless to argue, although our passports bore a *laissez-passer* for the Sinkiang frontier. 'I have been

T.J.G.
I[inn at Hsinghsinghsia--Analyst]

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• 486 in Tientsin,' he said, 'and know Westerners well; they are always in a hurry. Now you stay here and thoroughly rest for a few days.' Our hearts sank at the prospect of official procrastination and excuses, but we would not give ourselves away as impatient foreigners, so thanked him and smiled, thus avoiding the fate of one concerning whom it is written:

> 'All that was left was a tombstone white,
> Because he tried to hustle the East.'

742 We found on enquiry that the garrison 1 held a thousand men, and that two of the Commanding Officers had 000 each a wife with him. Changing into clean dresses we therefore started out forthwith to pay our respects to these ladies. One of them was little more than a pitiful child, cowed to the point of scarcely daring to open her mouth, and whose husband was a heavy opium-smoker. The other lady was a strong-minded, intelligent Moslem, of a fine physique. She talked with us on a variety of subjects and made us give her a lesson in the Government Phonetic Script, of which she already knew something from a young Shansi boy who was not allowed to proceed on his journey and was acting as her servant.

Returning to the inn, we unpacked the travelling harmonium and some parcels of books, and accompanied by the Christian men proceeded to hold an open-air service. In a moment the gambling rings were broken up and we were surrounded by an eager crowd of listeners. Then the two officers appeared, and took control of the men. Hymn-sheets were handed round, and soon the choruses were taken up and sung vigorously. The sight of the gaily-bound gospels and other books proved so attractive that we were overwhelmed with customers, and from the time of our first service we had

1 [At Hsinghsinghsia -- Analyst

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no further trouble in the inn from inquisitive onlookers. We hung a curtain at our door and no one ventured to lift it.

The aspect of Hsinghsinghsia was very remarkable. It is a narrow ravine between massive rocks. All these were of sombre colour and forbidding outline, some being veined with long streaks of white granite, which traversed them just as forked-lightning appears to rend an ink-black sky. The lower portion of the rocks was worn by the waters of some ancient river, and an old tablet records that 'In this place baboons were wont to come to drink,' hence the name 'The Ravine of Baboons.' The only object of historical interest was the grave of a Mahommedan saint, whose tomb was cut in the solid rock. It was sealed, but hearing that we wished to see it, a sergeant broke the seals and allowed us to enter. The sepulchre dated from the Han dynasty, in the early days of the Christian era, and is believed by the faithful to hold an empty tomb, the holy man, whose name was Kai, having come to life again and passed elsewhere. In the Chinese temple the Taoist priest showed us with pride a fine specimen of quartz, which he had procured from a neighbouring hill. The name of Hsinghsinghsia, by the alteration of a character without changing the sound, may also be read 'The Starry Pass,' and the two names are used interchangeably. This quartz he called the 'Star Stone' and the hill from which it is taken 'Starry Mountain.' It glitters in the moonlight like a thousand twinkling stars.

As the evangelistic services continued we became very friendly with the men, from whom we heard many tragic stories. One boy of sixteen had been on his way from his home in Yungchang, Kansu, to an uncle, who had a business in Hami. 'My mother is a widow and I

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● 486 am her only child,' he told us. 'She has no idea what 702 has happened to me, and thinks that I am safe with my uncle in Hami. They stopped me here, and say that I am to be a soldier. They allow us neither to write nor to receive letters. I was born to an unlucky fate.'

An elderly man employed in the Yamen had left his wife in Urumchi in order to transact business in Kansu, but he was not allowed to get there, and had been doing office work for the garrison for over a year. He was attempting to forget his troubles by opium-smoking.

[681] A youth, whose legs were a terrible sight from flogging, came smiling to our room and addressed us by name: 'Do you know me?' he said. 'I am a Suchow boy and attended your Children's Service every night last winter. I would not believe the people who told me I should not get through to "Kow Wai," but this is the result of my folly!' We spoke about the wounds on his body, and he told us that he had run away and been recaptured by patrols, and then severely beaten on being brought back to the camp.

Some of the unfortunate men though supplied with adequate passports had been held up, waiting day after day hoping to hear that they might proceed on their journey. No telegram had ever come, nor had they any means of ascertaining whether the permission they hoped for had even been requested. The horrors of this Inferno were more strongly impressed on us each day. From early dawn till dark the men gambled, loafed, fought and cursed their fate. Young boys were thrown into the company of men to whom no form of vice was unknown, and a spirit of blank hopelessness dominated the place.

485 On the second night of our stay[1] heavy rain began to fall, and continued through the next day. It poured into our room by a dozen holes in the roof, and the

1 [At Hsinghsinghsia -- Analyst]

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mud floor was transformed into a series of mud pits so treacherously slippery that we had to move about with the greatest care. During a fine spell between two storms the Commanding Officer appeared at our door to return our call. We were not sorry that he should see our plight, but his only comment was: 'This is a small place, and the inns are poor. I suppose that in England your hotels are all better than this?'

Though we suffered so much discomfort from the rain, we were secretly rejoicing, because news was brought to us that a number of young men had escaped that night, and thanks to the rain had not yet been recaptured. Hsinghsinghsia has the only spring of water in an immense area, and the patrols found it sufficient to watch the next springs on either side in order to take deserters. As the hunted man crept stealthily to the water's edge to slake his thirst under cover of darkness, the mounted soldiers seized him, bound him and drove him back to the camp, where many had died from the severity of the flogging received. After the rains, however, little pools of water collected in the hollows of the granite rocks, and thus enabled the fugitives to leave the main road and so reach freedom. Many deaths had occurred through pedestrians, or mounted travellers, trying to cross the frontier without passing the camp. One day six riderless mules were captured, the men having, doubtless, died of thirst in the sands.

It was very touching to see the delight with which groups of these poor men would gather around us and talk for long hours. We had travelled so much in North China that we knew the localities from which several of them had come. Some from Shansi found that we actually knew the very villages where their parents lived, and in some cases we had even visited the homes of relatives. One youth was the son of the

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000 K[illegible] woman, Mrs. Ma, in whose home we had been entertained each time we passed through that town.

The great love that a Chinese, even though a prodigal, has for his home, brought many to the point of tears as we spoke of familiar scenes, and it was not difficult to speak to them of a Father in Heaven, Whose goods they were wasting in a far country, and Who was waiting for their return.

The Chinese are a long-suffering people; they bear the tyrannies of their oppressors, and the dominion of rapacious officialdom, with a pathetic resignation, but the hour is at hand when they will rise and avenge the wrongs of generations. In such an hour no violence is regarded as an excess, and they will deal with their oppressors in their own way.

CHAPTER XXXIV

GOBI NIGHTS

•486 On the second day of our sojourn in Hsinghsinghsia, seeing that no word had come to authorise our leaving, we thought we would communicate with Mr. Hunter, of the China Inland Mission in Urumchi, but when we innocently suggested that we wished to send a telegram, we were put off with the reply that it was needless to involve ourselves in unnecessary expense; and when we further insisted we were met with a blank refusal—the telegraph wires could be used by the military only. Seeing how things were going, we wrote a letter in which, knowing that it would be censored, we merely informed Mr. Hunter of our whereabouts; on the third day, however, calling at the post-office, we saw our letter still lying there on the table, and were told that the

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censor had not yet called! These incidents, naturally, greatly added to our sense of discomfort, and we now seriously began to wonder when we should be allowed to leave this place of detention.

A party of Tibetan lamas, with their attendants, were also, like ourselves, unable to proceed, and having pitched a group of tents on the sand, had already been waiting a week for their permission to move on. They were greatly inconvenienced by the delay as they were travelling with fifteen little donkeys, including their pack animals. On the fourth morning, there being still no word of the permission we were desiring, we wandered out to this Tibetan camp to enquire if the lamas were more fortunate than ourselves. 'Any news?' we asked. 'News? What news can you hope for with such a gang as this? Our donkeys will soon be dead for lack of fodder, and if we all die they don't care!'

As we sat and talked, a string of carts appeared, laden with sacks of wheat, bundles of fodder, vats of oil, and a few baskets of vegetables. This was the food supply for the camp,[1] as both men and beasts were fed from the Hami oasis, six days distant. We then followed the waggons back to the camp, and, glad of any diversion from the monotony of the day, we watched the unloading. We next paid the usual midday call to the telegraph office, and there, to our unspeakable relief, learnt that a message had at last come permitting both ourselves and the lamas to proceed. Fearful, however, lest the authorities might suddenly change their mind and insist on our taking a longer 'rest-cure,' we hurried back and issued orders that the animals should at once be fed and watered, and the carts prepared for an afternoon start. Therefore, when an hour later the officer called with news that the permit had come, we were almost ready to leave.

[1] [At Hsinghsinghsia -- Analyst]

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'The Governor declares,' read the officer, who this morning was in a flattering mood, 'that the three ladies, Feng Precious Pearl, Feng Polished Jade, and Kai All Brave, are people of the highest reputation, and therefore they, their escort and baggage, are permitted to enter Turkestan without delay.'

There was great lamentation in the garrison when the men saw us preparing to leave. 'They say that next week we shall get our pay, and if this be true we would have bought all your remaining books!' The gaming tables were abandoned as the crowd gathered to say good-bye and wish us good luck, and as we left the ravine an orderly appeared carrying a handful of vegetables—two cucumbers and a melon—from the officer's wife. The supply of these luxuries from Hami being very limited this gift represented a whole day's ration for her household.

It was with a delightful sense of freedom that we emerged from the 'Ravine of the Baboons' and took the desert path once more. We had left the grey and black pebbles of the Black Gobi behind us on the south side of the ravine, and we now came out into a most interesting and varied country. Granite hills surrounded us, and frequently the carts had to be dragged over immense slabs. The soil in places was red; the outlines of the ranges of hills were bare and rugged, while their colouring was as delicate as it was remarkable. Blue, purple, green and grey stretches of rock lay all around us, and as sun and shadow played on them the whole landscape was iridescent with the tones of the rainbow. We also passed at the very foot of the Starry Mountain, and there delayed a few minutes so as to fill our hands with the glittering fragments of quartz. At the base of the granite rocks were excavated holes, large enough to admit the entrance of a man's body, and

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once in five years. An unwritten law exacts that the journey south be taken in a cart with every appearance of affluence, lest fellow-townsmen should scoff and say: 'They went to "Kow Wai" to make a fortune, and have come back penniless vagrants!' A subtle appreciation of the ethics of filial piety has made it customary for the whole party when leaving home again to do so on foot, the suggestion being that every available dollar has been left with aged parents, and that the son starts out again a poor man to seek his fortune. The band was composed of eighteen youths, and one boy of fifteen who was nephew to the manager of the firm and had been entrusted by his uncle to the care of the older men. They had one donkey which carried a few bundles, and on which the lad was able to get a lift. Each one carried across his shoulder a flexible pole with a basket slung to either end, in one of which was his wadded quilt and a change of clothes, in the other a sack of flour and his bowl and chopsticks, while from the pole was also attached a little water can to carry a drink for the way. These men had tramped for over seventy days by track roads from central Shansi to the Yellow River, and from thence by the 'long grass route' to Ansi. This shortcut brought them across the north of Shensi and direct to the North-West territory, avoiding Lanchow. For several days we met them at each stage, and on the strength of being fellow-provincials we became exceedingly friendly. They told us that each man was allowed eighteen dollars (about £2) for road expenses, and by travelling very quickly and economically they were just able to do it for that amount.

'How did you get through Hsinghsinghsia?' we asked.

'We had return passports from the Governor when we left Kucheng last year,' they said, 'so they did not

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dare to detain us, and the head of the firm had given notice of the day we should cross the frontier; but we never knew a moment's peace till we were out of the hands of that gang. How different from General Feng's soldiers! We passed right through their fighting lines, and they never seized even our little donkey! The officer said, "These men are honest apprentices; they have a long journey ahead; no one is to touch them, their goods or their donkey!" That's something like an army!'

The following morning we reached 'Third Halt,' which we found to be a torrid place, lying in a cup of the hills. Our inn rooms were intolerably hot, and after a brief rest we got up and sat under the trees, hoping to escape from the flies, and also seize the advantage of any passing breeze. While resting there we heard the sound of the familiar camel-bell, and looking up watched a string of sixty of these beasts cross the village stream. The banks were muddy, and the awkwardness of the camel when walking on slippery ground was evident. These beasts frequently come to grief when attempting to travel on other than sandy roads, and broken legs are not infrequent at a river's edge. The driver was a Barkul man, which city is colonised by Chinese, many of whom make their living by grazing camels. The Turki is of no use as a camel driver. He is too impetuous, and seems unable to give these animals the peculiar care which they need. Strong, long-lived, and enduring, as they are under good conditions, they easily lose heart, and once overdriven never recover. Rough treatment, hustle or untoward difficulties play havoc with these creatures, whose temperamental qualities seem to be as strange as their physical peculiarities. Once their spirit is broken they are of no further use, and lie down and die.

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feature. The first night after Kucheng we slept at Tsimusa—' The City of Everlasting Trust '—and seeing a military guard at the gate we knew that an officer would shortly call for our passports. On this occasion, however, the innkeeper failed to inform the authorities of the arrival of foreigners, and when the soldiers came to demand our papers they were exceedingly angry, and threatened him with a beating if he neglected this part of his duty again. The upshot of the fuss was that the innkeeper spent the whole night in raging and cursing officials, foreigners, passports, and soldiers alike, vowing that no ' foreign devil ' should again darken his doors ! To judge by the experience of this and other journeys in Kansu and Turkestan, it is of the greatest importance that travellers' passports should be in strict order, and up-to-date. We were required to produce these documents at the most unlikely places, and sometimes they were examined both on entering and on leaving a city, as well as at the Yamen. We were thankful to quit the ' Inn of the Cursing Landlord ' at 5 a.m. and proceed on our journey towards Santai—' The Third Stage.' The road took us for seventy *li* over grassy steppes, and for the last fifteen *li* we drove by rapid streams between fields of maize and sorgum, bordered by hedges and shaded by overhanging trees. The whole scene, apart from the nature of the crops, might have been an English rural landscape, and it warmed our hearts as we thought of the pleasures of soon wandering in English lanes and fields.

We were feeling the fatigue of our long journey much more severely now that we were enduring the added strain of great heat, and though the night stages were at an end, such a diary entry as : ' Rose at 2-30 a.m. and took a very heavy, hot stage,' speaks for itself. The carters also were suffering from the prolonged

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however, he could not consider unless a companion were forthcoming who would stay with Mr. Hunter during his absence. A volunteer was found in Mr. Ridley, of Sining, in Kansu, who had, we knew, recently arrived in Urumchi to take over Mr. Mather's work, and thus release him for furlough; and this being so, we had mutually agreed to travel together from Urumchi to Europe. We had never yet met him, but five miles from the city both gentlemen appeared on horseback to greet us, Mr. Mather welcoming us as the first fellow-countrywomen he had seen for twelve years!

We soon came in sight of the city, which was well wooded, and arrived at the Outer Gate, where soldiers, as usual, demanded our passports. 'Have you met any lamas by the way?' they enquired. 'We have been expecting some for several days, and you must have seen them on the road.' No one ever gives any information when officially questioned, so we simply changed the subject, knowing, notwithstanding, that they must be referring to the party of Tibetans who left Hsinghsinghsia with us, and whom we had passed and repassed all the way. As we moved on, information was imparted to our servants that the guard were under orders to seize the whole party of priests, and conduct them to the prison, as they were accused of being undesirable characters; and two days later, to prison they went.

The streets of Urumchi impressed us as being irregular, narrow, lacking in architectural beauty, crowded and dirty. We had lost sight of Mr. Hunter several hours previously, but as we drew up to the Mission House, there he stood in the doorway to receive us. The white home-spun cotton had vanished and he now wore his best black suit, and a black soft felt hat, while the clumsy traveller's boots were replaced by well-polished

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of his friends who would not leave until Saturday. He therefore removed a wheel from the tarantass on the plea of necessary repairs, and by Friday at midday the wheelwright had not yet finished his job. It was only under the strong pressure brought by Mr. Hunter, who refused to leave the workshop until the wheel was mended, that Friday afternoon saw the empty tarantass rattle over the rough road and draw up at the side door of the Mission Compound.

Our personal luggage was very little, knowing, as we did, that when we reached the Siberian railway we must not carry more than regulation weight. We were also advised not to take books, papers, letters, nor photographs into Russia. Our cameras, consequently, were left behind, as also our organ, and all personal effects beyond a hand-valise each, and a wadded quilt for bedding. It was well for Mr. Mather that this delay had occurred, for it was not until sunset on the Thursday that he even began to ram a few things into a kitbag in view of the journey.

The food-box was royally supplied by gifts from the generous Urumchi people, who vied with one another in making this an opportunity to express their appreciation of the two men who had lived and worked in their midst for so many years. The Governor sent us an ample supply of tinned food for the road, and of tea, sugar, cake, biscuits, bread and candles there was more than we could carry. Russian friends had sent cakes and a supply of delicious conserves, the like of which are met in no country but Russia, made from mountain strawberries, which are plentiful in Urumchi.

The men who had accompanied us from Suchow were now very anxious to return, so we had made an application for a passport to enable them to cross through Hsinghsinghsia. Naturally, all concerned felt great

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anxiety as to what might await them at the frontier, and it was not until we were home in Europe that we heard how they fared when passing into Kansu. On arrival at Hsinghsinghsia they presented their passports to an officer whom they failed to recognise, but who at once made himself known to them as the man whom we had picked up, dying of thirst, outside Ansi: 'Pass on,' he said, 'I know you, and owe my life to your party, and to the ladies who gave me a place on their carts. You may leave when you please.'

Molly was to remain as a guest in Mr. Hunter's stable until we should need her again, and from news since received, evidently continues to enjoy more than her due of care and attention. Little as our baggage seemed when we were packing our three small valises, by the time all was collected it made a formidable pile. Though the heat was intense we were each obliged to take a fur coat, knowing what bitter cold nights lay ahead, while a kettle, saucepan and iron tripod were necessary for cooking purposes. Packets of tracts and gospels were essential, and we each required a fair-sized cushion, to use by day in the cart and by night as a pillow.

When the tarantass arrived the driver had already captured a place for his large bag of grain, and a pocket, capable of great expansion, hung also at his elbow, the use of which became apparent on the journey. An hour of hard work saw the cart packed and roped, and each bundle in its place, but the remaining space was indeed a tight fit for three, although we consoled ourselves with the usual fallacious hope that so many of the packages containing food the load must diminish every day! A group of friends was waiting outside the city gate to bid us farewell, and here, too, we had to part with the faithful companions from Suchow, whose care had done so much to mitigate the difficulties of the